

Chairman Report Annual Assembly 2018

This time last year, it was decided to return to tradition and hold full Parish Council (PC) meetings every other month, rather than every month.

We also decided not to divide the Council into sub-Committees but to hold "Task & Finish" (T&F) group meetings for Councillors to work on special projects. These would be convened as required and would report their findings back to Full Council.

One such T&F group has worked long and hard on the West Lodge project. West Lodge is the Grade 11 listed gatehouse to the Gunpowder Mills site. Along with Councillors, this group included representation from the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills Group (Andrew Norris) and Chilworth2gether (Maggie Scott).

On behalf of the whole Chilworth community, I particularly want to record thanks to this group for their commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for our village's very special nationally recognised heritage site.

It was hoped that Guildford Borough Council (GBC) might be persuaded to support the PC to retain West Lodge for community use, rather than selling it on the open market.

After two years work on this project, however, we have failed to achieve this end. GBC could not be persuaded that selling this important heritage asset, immediately adjacent to the Scheduled National Monument site of Chilworth Gunpowder Mills, would be a significant heritage loss to the Borough.

GBC will now be advertising its intention in the local press to appropriate the property for planning purposes and seeking consent from the Secretary of State to dispose of it.

The PC are very disappointed by this outcome and will be deciding this evening whether to write to the Secretary of State, expressing our objections to the appropriation of West Lodge for planning purposes.

Whilst we fully accept that GBC is obliged to come up with a solution that is cost effective, we are not persuaded that GBC has fully considered all the possible options and we feel that there are alternatives to outright and irreversible disposal of this iconic property.

The PC is also concerned that GBC has ignored its own Conservation Management Plan for the Gunpowder Mills site as adopted in 2013.

The PC's preferred option is that the building should be retained by GBC, thus allowing GBC to still retain ownership and control of the building and the PC has offered to work with GBC to look at different options in order to achieve this.

The pre-planning advice the PC received on West Lodge leads the PC to believe that there would be severe planning and parking restrictions and therefore the PC will be monitoring carefully any possible future planning applications for West Lodge and looking to see that there is no over-development of the area.

Other projects that the PC has been involved in include the Tillingbourne Tales & Trials initiative that is now displayed in Shere Museum and the Quiet Lanes and De-Cluttering Group. Special thanks must go to Cllr Mrs Allen for her work on getting redundant road signs removed and smartening others.

Cllrs Mrs Allen and Brown have also been attending meetings with the Community Rail Partnership Line Group. Do note improvements at Chilworth station, not least the new GWR station sign and the repair and renovation of the public phone box.

Apparently, local organisations can 'adopt' their village station – any offers??

The PC can eventually report that improvements to the stretch of A248 between Blacksmith Lane and Mill Lane including the stretch known locally as 'the cheese grater' is finally scheduled for this financial year and we are pleased to note that the work to be undertaken is classed as major maintenance and not merely surface dressing.

Our co-operation with Shalford PC continues, one practical consequence being the shared use of their Vehicle Activated Sign in an effort to slow traffic through our village.

The PC continues to be consulted on all planning applications received by GBC for our parish and its immediate surrounds. We have requested 'Local Listing' in a couple of cases and our village War Memorial has now been awarded listed status.

We have seen some personnel changes during the year.

January saw the resignation from the PC of Cllr Peter Corning. We were very sorry to see him go and we thank him for his work on the PC's behalf, particularly for his commitment to the West Lodge project.

Later that month, we were delighted to unanimously appoint Cllr Graham Brown at our January meeting.

We do still, though, have a vacancy on the PC. Please consider whether you might be able to give some time to serving your local community in this way – if so, we would be delighted to hear from you!

We are very aware of the new General Data Protection Regulation and please note that Councillors will have new contact email addresses from 25th May. These will be advertised on the website, village notice-boards and in the Chilworth Parish Magazine.

Finally, I thank Michael Lunnon, Patricia Allen, John Peake, Richard Good, Graham Brown, our Clerk Anne Tait, - and our unswerving supporter, Rosemary Lemon – for all the time and commitment you give to the PC.

Stephanie Sokolowski

Chairman

17th May 2018